

EUROPEAN UNION-AUSTRALIA MINISTERIAL CONSULTATIONS

The European Union and Australia today opened negotiations on a treaty-level Framework Agreement.

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President of the Commission, who is in Canberra for the EU-Australia Ministerial Consultations, said the proposed Agreement not only recognises the value we place on the EU-Australia relationship, but also provides a firm basis for expanding our practical collaboration in areas such as foreign affairs and security, development assistance, climate change, research, science and education.

"The Agreement would give political expression to our commitment to build a stronger, forward-looking partnership," High Representative Ashton said.

Australian Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd said it is a significant milestone in the Australia-EU relationship.

"It opens a new phase of closer cooperation between Australia and the EU that better accommodates our broad interests and priorities," Mr Rudd said.

The negotiations will begin this afternoon (31 October) with introductory Senior Officials' discussions and will continue over the coming months in several substantive rounds to be held in Brussels and Canberra. The shared goal is to conclude the negotiations in 2012.

High Representative Ashton and Foreign Minister Rudd also agreed to open negotiations on a separate Crisis Management Agreement.

"Recent events in North Africa and the Middle East have underlined the value in Australia and the EU cooperating closely in responding to international crises," High Representative Ashton said. "The proposed Agreement will facilitate this cooperation, by making it easier for Australia to contribute to EU crisis management operations."

High Representative Ashton and Foreign Minister Rudd agreed on the first two EU-Australia delegated aid projects, in South Sudan - where the EU will deliver food-security assistance on Australia's behalf - and in Fiji, where Australia will deliver a component of the EU's assistance.

They underlined that this partnership would improve the effectiveness of aid delivery in Africa and the Pacific. Australia is the first non-European donor with which the EU has established delegated aid cooperation arrangements.

The High Representative and Minister welcomed the signature of a revised Passenger Name Record Agreement in Brussels on 29 September 2011 and its endorsement by the European Parliament on 27 October.

The Agreement provides for the transfer of passenger information on travellers between the EU and Australia, strengthening security in both jurisdictions.

High Representative Ashton said: *“This Agreement strikes the right balance between the need to maximise air travel security and to prevent terrorist offences, on the one hand, and the safeguarding of the right of our citizens to protection of their personal records, on the other.”*

“The new Agreement will be an essential element in Australia’s border security system by assisting authorities in combatting terrorism and transnational crime, while ensuring effective protection of EU-sourced passenger data,” Mr Rudd said.

The High Representative and Minister also discussed a range of regional and international issues, including the G20, global and regional economic challenges, nuclear non-proliferation, piracy, and developments in East Asia, the Pacific, the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia.

High Representative Ashton’s visit to Australia as a Guest of Government follows the visit European Commission President Barroso in September 2011.